



WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

P.O. BOX 8952 • MADISON, WI 53708

June 17, 2020

DELIVERED ELECTRONICALLY

Governor Tony Evers
115 East State Capitol
Madison WI 53702

Governor Evers,

Last week, the Wisconsin Legislative Black Caucus requested that a special session be convened on Friday, June 19 to consider and enact legislation aimed at reforming our justice system. We write today in support of our colleagues in their call for the legislature to meet. In addition to the leadership you have offered to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion in state government, we appreciate the strong support you have offered for the Black Lives Matter movement in the wake of the brutal murder of George Floyd, and noting the many demonstrations in support of reform across our state and country, we have a responsibility to ensure equity and safety for all Wisconsinites.

It is clear that the status quo is unacceptable. The fact is, we cannot uphold the words of our founding, that all are created equal, unless we make the needed reforms to put those words into action. As you have said often, “the will of the people is the law of the land.” There is an urgency in this moment, for action that is long overdue. It is time for the legislature to achieve justice and equality under the law for people across Wisconsin. Beyond removing barriers to justice and equality, elected officials must act now to demonstrate our true commitment to meaningful change. We must seize this opportunity no matter how long it takes.

It is especially important that you call this special session for June 19, or Juneteenth, as it is nationally celebrated as the end of slavery in America. While Black people were freed from bondage over 150 years ago, our Black communities continue to be met with racism, inhumane treatment, and extrajudicial killings on a daily basis. This reality is precisely why Black people gather for Juneteenth — it represents that freedom and justice are always delayed for them in this country. You have the opportunity to take a powerful stance in support of progress for Black lives by calling the legislature into session on the only holiday that marks both struggle and triumph for Black Americans.

The issues facing Wisconsin and our nation are not new. In fact Wisconsin’s distinction as the worst state for racial disparities for Black people has been true for decades. Disproportionate incarceration levels, less economic opportunity, and unfavorable educational outcomes are all areas that have not improved in our state despite endless calls for action.

More than a decade ago, former Governor Jim Doyle put together a bipartisan Commission on Reducing Racial Disparities in the Wisconsin Justice System. In their final report, the commission stated:

“Disparity in imprisonment contributes to disparity in education, employment, income, health care, and other areas. Therefore, it is imperative to address disparity in imprisonment in any and all ways that are feasible and just. It is not an exaggeration to call racial disparity across these different areas, including incarceration rates, a genuine crisis for the country and the state of Wisconsin. It is not merely a problem of appearance; it is a calamity that builds on itself. The criminal justice system has to own its part of the problem, even though it cannot solve all aspects of the problem.

The evidence is that in some areas, particularly enforcement of the drug laws, some disparity results from policies and practices that have disparate impacts on people of color – most heavily on African-Americans – and these policies and practices should be carefully reviewed and could be improved by police, prosecutors and defense attorneys, judges, corrections officials, social workers, and others who work in and influence the operation of the juvenile justice and criminal justice systems.

Unfortunately, most of the recommendations made in the final report were not acted upon and successfully implemented. And not much has changed. This session, Legislative Democrats put forward comprehensive proposals to reform our justice system. A special session could include legislative proposals that deserve a debate, including in the areas of reforms for those who are incarcerated, charged, or in police custody; reforms for those who are post-incarceration or on supervision; reforms to prevent and divert entry into the criminal justice system; and reforms on police use of force.

It is clear this work will continue. Beyond any legislative session, the next state budget will need to make necessary investments to reduce racial disparities that exist not only in our justice system, but also in health care, education, and economic opportunity.

As we have said, we must act to seize this opportunity to bring equity for Black people in Wisconsin. We look forward to working with you as we work to achieve meaningful, lasting change for the people we represent.

Sincerely,



Representative Gordon Hintz



Representative Dianne Hesselbein



Representative Mark Spreitzer



Representative Steve Doyle



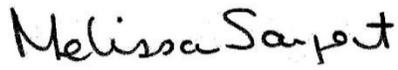
Representative Evan Goyke



Representative Daniel Riemer



Representative Amanda Stuck



Representative Melissa Sargent



Representative Don Vruwink



Representative Marisabel Cabrera



Representative Jodi Emerson



Representative Tip McGuire



Representative Lisa Subeck



Representative Greta Neubauer



Representative Tod Ohnstad



Representative Sondy Pope



Representative Robyn Vining



Representative Beth Meyers



Representative Nick Milroy



Representative JoCasta Zamarripa



Representative Jimmy Anderson



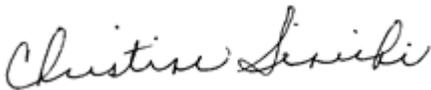
Representative Jonathan Brostoff



Representative Gary Hebl



Representative Katrina Shankland



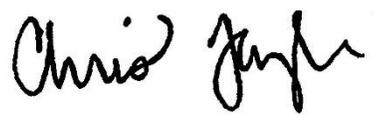
Representative Christine Sinicki



Representative Debra Kolste



Representative Jill Billings

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chris Taylor". The letters are cursive and connected.

Representative Chris Taylor

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dave Considine". The letters are cursive and connected.

Representative Dave Considine